

Montana School Renewal Commission
Statements of Consensus
Updated 8/23/04

Concept: Full Day Kindergarten
Statement: Research shows that full day kindergarten enhances better skills, fewer grade retentions, reduction of behavioral problems, better sustained performance, and millions of dollars as savings.
Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Dissenting votes-Commissioner Steve Gibson expressed equity concerns, Commissioner Bob Keenan expressed fiscal concerns, Commissioner Pat Wagman expressed fiscal, equity, taxation, and philosophical concerns, Commissioner Mary Whittinghill expressed equity and fiscal concerns.

Neutral votes-Commissioner Doug Mood thought this issue was not a high priority.

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

Concept: Gifted and Talented
Statement: The Commission support legislation which would restore the position of Gifted and Talented Specialist in the Office of Public Instruction with an appropriate budget for an advisory council, professional development, liaison activities with post-secondary teacher preparation programs, and other outreach services.
Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

Concept: Special Education
Statement: The Renewal Commission support legislation which would begin to “phase in” increased state support for Special Education for such programs as services for “high cost” students with disabilities, Preschool Services, Extended School Year Services, and professional development activities. Increased state support for special education should be provided in a balanced manner with the goal of offsetting local expenditures for special education.

Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

Concept: Educator Recruitment and Retention

Statement: Statewide school district employee insurance pooling with state incentives for participation.

Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

Concept: Summer Opportunities and Extended School Opportunities

Statement: Encourage greater flexibility in the school calendar and time (days/hours) requirements. Encourage local school districts to provide expanded learning opportunities addressing the unique learning needs of all students by flexing time and resources.

Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Summer and Extended School Opportunities

Statement: State facilitated public/private partnerships for locally based summer programs and extended school programs for identified students.

Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Dissenting Votes-Commissioner Eric Feaver indicated his non-approval of the statement with the word "private" included.

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Pupil Instruction Related Days
Statement: **Without reducing the minimum aggregate hours of pupil instruction required by law**, encourage greater flexibility in the school calendar and time (hours/days) requirements. Encourage local school districts to provide expanded **professional development** opportunities.
Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Cultural Education
Statement: State funded Indian Education for All curriculums and policies/rules developed through partnerships led by the Office of Public Instruction, Board of Public Education, and legislature including Indian educators, tribes, and others. These partnerships will develop and implement:

- Policies/rules that support and insure that all schools provide the necessary guidance to the school instructional staff and programs to include culturally appropriate instruction for students.
- Professional development for all school personnel to insure they are adequately prepared to provide instruction and supportive services for all students, including Indian students.
- Curriculum development and supportive instructional resources necessary to meet state accreditation guidelines as well as local district standards to integrate culturally appropriate American/Montana Indian Lessons in all curricular areas in grades K-12 for all students.
- Assessments standards that incorporate measurements for the achievement of all students and are tied to the goals of Indian Education for All.

All Montana Schools supported by partnerships led by the Montana Board of Public Education, the Office of Public Instruction, and Legislature will provide educational opportunities to eliminate the wide disparity in educational achievement that exists between the American Indian students in Montana's Public Schools and their non-Indian peers as clearly documented by educational achievement research and data.

Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Neutral votes-Commissioner Bob Keenan stated that he supported this statement but was concerned that he hadn't had adequate time to look over the statement. Commissioner Doug Mood was uncomfortable with the linking of the two subjects; need to address

cultural education separate from dropout rate as the dropout issue is not exclusive to the Indian population.

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Quality Infrastructure

Statement: The Renewal Commission recognizes that adequate infrastructure, in the form of physical plant and equipment, is a key component of a quality educational system. Overcrowded, substandard and inappropriate facilities negatively impact the learning environment. Although the Renewal Commission did not have the time or resources to explore in detail the infrastructure needs of Montana schools the Commission recognizes:

- The importance of quality infrastructure;
- The unequal resources available to individual school districts to meet their infrastructure needs.

Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Neutral votes-Commissioner Keenan stated that he didn't recall receiving this information prior to the meeting, therefore, needed more time. Commissioner Pat Wagman felt this issue would likely be the next lawsuit and he needed more time to digest the statement.

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Full Day Kindergarten

Statement: The Montana Legislature should strongly consider the benefits of expanding kindergarten services to improve student learning and achievement and should provide the statutory and budgetary flexibility to school districts so they can offer additional kindergarten services for all students. School districts should receive state funding proportionate to the level of service they provide for kindergarten students ranging from half time to full time programming.

Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Neutral votes-Commissioner Steve Gibson feels this statement is "building in" discrimination.

Dissenting votes-Commissioner Doug Mood felt it was not desirable to prioritize how to spend money, feels it is more important to spend resources on teachers' salaries.

Commissioner Mary Whittinghill would support a statement that strongly encourages the legislature to look at the benefits of expansion of our current kindergarten in terms of

state funding, studies. She believes this issue warrants further research to fully understand the implications of expansion of the program. Commissioner Pat Wagman reiterates what was previously stated. Commissioner Bob Keenan believes MCA 20-7-117 speaks adequately to the issue.

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Remove Barriers to Consolidation

Statement: The School Renewal Commission recommends that the following areas of the law be clarified to eliminate barriers to voluntary consolidation.

1. Provisions for consolidation of one K-12 district with another K-12 district should be included in statute wherever they are currently absent. Specifically, it should be made clear in statute that a K-12 district may consolidate with another K-12 district without first being required to dissolve its K-12 structure.
2. The Commission believes that the K-12 structure is the most efficient school district structure and does not recommend allowing K-12 districts to be dissolved to consolidate with a stand alone elementary district.
3. Statute should specify that a newly consolidated district becomes an official entity on July 1 following a successful vote on consolidation in each of the constituent districts.
4. The governance of a consolidated district should be clarified in the following manner. Immediately following voter approval of a consolidation (elementary, high school or K-12) a joint board, composed of the members of the existing school boards of the participating districts should be formed to deal with transitional issues. The joint board would also serve as the governing board of the newly consolidated district from the July 1 effective date of the consolidation until the next regular school trustee election. At that election the appropriate number of trustees for the new district would be elected by the combined voters of the new district, with the lengths of terms to be assigned by drawing of lots.
5. The law should specify that the existing elected boards of the consolidating districts would continue their duties and perform close-out duties related to their individual districts until the July 1 effective date. The joint board would address all planning, budgeting, contracting and hiring issues related to the operation of the newly consolidated district.
6. The law should specify that any ongoing building reserve or technology depreciation levies accrue to and become the responsibility of the newly formed district as a whole in the same dollar amounts that were originally approved.

7. The law should allow joint districts (defined as those with territory in more than one county) to be formed by consolidation, annexation or the attachment of an abandoned district to a neighboring district. Currently, joint districts may be created by consolidation, but may not be formed by annexation or attachment.
8. MCA 20-6-410 be expanded to include unification.

The School Renewal Commission recommends no change in state statute in the following areas:

1. Employment status and tenure issues are adequately covered in state law. Bargaining of a new collective bargaining agreement should be left to management and labor in the newly consolidated district under applicable labor laws and under the guidance of the Board of Personnel Appeals.
2. There is a potential need for both an annexation and a consolidation process in different situations. Therefore, the Commission recommends retaining both processes in state law.
3. The Commission recommends that the requirement for an affirmative vote in both districts for consolidation be retained. Approval by voters in effected districts provides necessary legitimacy to the process.
4. The Commission rejects the idea of instituting a trial period for consolidation during which “de-consolidation” could occur. Consolidation should be final. The technical issues involved with de-consolidating a district would be great. Current laws governing cooperative agreements between districts provide ample opportunities for districts to experiment with cooperation prior to deciding to consolidate. Districts can currently share administration, staff, programs, purchasing, etc., as well as the sponsorship of athletic programs.
5. The law should specify that all consolidations and annexations (including those that take place across county lines) take place with or without the assumption of bonded indebtedness. Currently the assumption or non-assumption of bonded indebtedness is a separate issue that can overshadow and taint the consideration of the consolidation issue itself. Debt associated with the capital assets that become the property of and will benefit a consolidated district should be the responsibility of the new district as a whole.

Finally, the Commission believes that some structural features of the current funding system and the current taxation system create disincentives to consolidation when such consolidation might otherwise make sense. These structural features include:

- the fact that the basic entitlement is the same for districts of every size;
- the fact that the taxable valuations available to support schools vary widely from district to district.

The Commission recommends that tax inequities between school districts be addressed and that any new funding formula avoid building in disincentives to consolidation.

Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Regionalization of School Services

Statement: The Regionalization Working Group strongly views regional education service agencies as a key component in restructuring and renewing public education in Montana. Through hours of deliberate discussion, research, and analysis of ESA's in other states, working group members have determined that intensive study of this issue is warranted, as the potential benefits of an effective ESA system. Benefits include:

- Enhanced opportunities for students and educators.
- More streamlined and effective partnerships between state and local education governance, significant cost savings; and greater accountability, communication, and coordination between local school districts.

Vote: Unanimous Consensus

Votes not in complete support: None

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

Concept: Revenue and Taxation Modernization

Statement:

1. Implement a statewide equalization plan with an emphasis on homeowner equity and uniform property taxation.
2. Fund the base budget using statewide equalization.
3. Use **equalized funding** to fund 80-100% (maximized) budget.
4. A balanced taxation approach that includes existing statewide taxes such as property taxes, income taxes, and natural resource taxes and also considers new revenue such as a general statewide sales tax to be used as a **mechanism for equalization**.
5. A balanced taxation approach that includes existing statewide taxes such as property taxes, income taxes, and natural resource taxes and also considers new revenue such as a general statewide sales tax to be used as a **mechanism for funding quality public schools**.

(Changes and differentiations are noted in bold print.)

Vote: Majority Consensus

Votes not in complete support:

Neutral votes-Commissioner Pat Wagman stated that he doesn't have a good enough understanding of the issues. Commissioner Doug Mood supports the proposal but a number of tax proposals on the surface are excellent and the die in the legislature due to fierce opponents. Commissioner Mary Whittinghill fears that they will end up being a total package and might get lost as separate items when they are proposed as a whole package. Commissioner Keith Allen personally supports this but the organization he represents (AFL/CIO) opposes a sales tax.

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004
